PREPARING SAILORS TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE FLEET
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GREAT LAKES, Ill. - Surrounded by a haze of smoke, the hose team, dressed in protective gear, wastes no time in fighting the storeroom blaze. The firemen, who are actually engineering students participating in Damage Control (DC) training, manage to extinguish the fire in less than five minutes.

The firefighting exercise, which is part of the new Basic Engineering Common Core (BECC) curriculum means that all engineers at the Training Support Center, Great Lakes (TSC) will be receiving basic damage control training.

Instructor DC2(SW) Scott Kilgore, who specializes in preparing students for the Fire Trainer said, “Now we get all different rates coming in such as Electrician’s Mates and Machinist’s Mates. All these engineering students going to the Fleet are going to have some sort of damage control knowledge whereas previously they had very minimal.”

The BECC course, which has revolutionized the methodology of training engineers, begins with three weeks of DC training, which includes firefighting, fire prevention, ship stability, chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) warfare defense, and maintenance and repair of damage control systems and equipment.

Unlike other aspects covered in BECC, the DC component offers the most practical element of training, with students going through live case scenarios where they battle fires, repair real equipment during a flood and are exposed to tear gas so that they can become familiar with using their gas masks.

The fire trainer involves students fighting fires for two days on a mock-up ship in areas where they are most likely to occur such as the storeroom, galley and berthing. The wet trainer, which consists of four compartments that are set up to look like the inside of a ship with pipes and valves, provides the students with live flood training.

“Students go in to assess and repair the damage just like they would on a ship,” said Kilgore. “It actually floods out while they’re in the space, with us (instructors) controlling the amount of flooding that’s coming in.”

Most students agree that among the most difficult of the practical training is the exercise in the gas chamber where they are exposed to a tear gas agent (CS). The gas chamber is referred to as the Confidence Chamber since the purpose of the exercise is to give students the confidence that their gas masks work. After being exposed to the gas for a certain amount of time, usually between 50 to 60 seconds, they are instructed to put their masks back on. The exercise is designed to quicken their response time in an emergency situation.

CBR Instructor DC1(SW) Dave Gagnon said, “These Sailors -- 80 or 90 percent -- will be in the Gulf a year from now, so if we subject them to this they will be positively, absolutely sure how to put the mask on and do it right.”

In each hallway of the DC School there is a poster displaying historical examples of ships that encountered danger. Among the examples is the USS Forrestal aircraft carrier, which lost 134 people on July 29, 1967, to fires and explosions after a missile from one of its own planes ruptured a fuel tank on a nearby jet. The example shows the extent to which damage control is imperative.

BECC Director CWO2 Scott Johnson said providing all engineers with DC training is an advantage for the Fleet. “Many of the ships are doing three to four week indoctrination sessions to teach DC and 3M Maintenance and a large part of our BECC focus is really detailed on those two programs.”

To learn more about BECC and damage control, visit the Center for Naval Engineering page on Navy Knowledge Online at www.nko.navy.mil